

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

PC-01 CU-02 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00

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P R 052114Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9015

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 5173

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THOSE COLOMBIANS WHO LEFT TOWN EARLY FOR ANOTHER LONG HOLIDAY WEEKEND LEFT WITH A SENSE OF FOREBODING THAT THEIR RETURN WOULD SEE A MAJOR CONFRONTATION BETWEEN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND FACULTY, ACQ THE GOVERNMENT, AND A CONSEQUENT POSSIBLE STATE OF SEIGE.

THE PRECEDING CONFRONTATION WHICH HAD INVOLVED HASTY, DRAMATIC CHANGES IN THE MILITARY COMMAND AND RAISED COUP ANXIETIES HAD BARELY SUBSIDED AND APPREHENSION DISPELLED IN TIME TO GIVE WAY TO THE NEW ONE INVOLVING STUDENTS. THE DISCRIMINATING COLOMBIAN MAY HAVE OBSERVED THAT THESE DISSIMILAR EVENTS HAD A T LEAST ONE ELEMENT IN COMMON: THE GOVERNMENT WAS CREATING PROBLEMS FOR ITSELF THROUGH THE UNCOORDINATED AND SOMETIMES INJUDICIOUS ACTIONS AND WORDS OF ITS VARIOUS PARTS. MEANWHILE, OTHER, NON-SELF INFLICTED PROBLEMS, REMAINED. A CONTINUING CEMENT WORKERS STRIKE CAUSED GROWING JOB LOSSES IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY AND A JUMP IN THE MAY COST-OF-LIVING INDICATED THAT THE FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION WAS NOT YET

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WON. END SUMMARY

2. UNIVERSITY DISPUTE. RECENT EVENTS INVOLVING THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY DISPUTE ONCE AGAIN CALL INTO QUESTION PRESIDENT LOPEZ'S ABILITY TO MANAGE HIS GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVELY. THIS DIFFICULTY, LIKE OTHER RECENT ONES (1MILITARY FIRINGS, INTEMPERATE REMARKS BY THE MINISTERS OF LABOR, EDUCATION, JUSTICE WHICH ANTAGONIZED, RESPECTIVELY, INDUSTRIALISTS, PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES, THE SUPREME COURT) SHARES AT LEAST ONE COMMON ELEMENT WITH THE OTHERS: THE CONFLICTS HAVE EITHER BEEN BETWEEN, OR INITIATED BY, VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT, MOVING AND SPEAKING IN CONFLICTING WAYS, APPARENTLY IN THE ABSENCE OF FIRM DIRECTION FROM THE PRESIDENT.

3. IN THE UNIVERSITY DISPUTE, LOPEZ IN THE END ACTED DECISIVELY IN FIRING PEREZ, ALTHOUGH HIS ONLY OTHER COURSE OF ACTION AT THAT POINT WOULD HAVE BEEN TO FIRE, OR TO DISCLAIM THE ACTS OF, THE MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND THE GOVERNOR OF CUNDINAMARCA. MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE THE LATTER FOUR ACTED TOO HASTILY IN ORDERING SECURITY FORCES TO CLEAR THE HOSPITAL, WHEN THE RECTOR HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO MOVE PEOPLE OUT. THERE IS ALSO CONSIDERABLE DOUBT WHETHER THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF DAMAGE TO THE HOSPITAL LIES WITH THE OCCUPIERS OR THE SECURITY FORCES. THESE CONSIDERATIONS HAVE CREATED A SYMPATHETIC CLIMATE OF OPINION FOR THE STUDENTS, RARELY ENJOYED BY THEM, THANKS TO THE ILL-CONSIDERED ACTIONS OF THE MINISTERS. THE INCIDENT ALSO CASTS DOUBT ON THE WISDOM OF LOPEZ'S APPOINTMENT OF A MARXIST AS NATIONAL RECTOR, AS THE EDUCATION MINISTER DURAN CORRECTLY BUT INDISCREETLY POINTED OUT WHEN HE SAID "THOSE WHO DESCRIBED US AS IMPRUDENT (WERE PROVED RIGHT)". IT WOULD SEEM THAT DURAN WILL RANK HIGHER ON THE STEADILY LENGTHENING LIST OF MINISTERS LIKELY TO BE REMOVED DURING THE NEXT CABINET CHANGES, WHICH MANY EXPECT NEXT MONTH. THE EXPECTED LARGE-SCALE STUDENT PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE NOT YET OCCURRED ALTHOUGH MOST OBSERVERS ANTICIPATE THAT THEY SOON WILL UNLESS AN EFFECTIVE STATE OF SIEGE IS CLAMPED ON FIRST.

4. AFTERMATH OF MILITARY CHANGES. THE PUBLIC MOOD OF APPREHENSION OF PREVIOUS WEEKS CAUSED BY MILITARY CHANGES AND RUMORS OF COUP PLOTTING HAS BEEN LARGELY DISPELLED.
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PUBLIC STATEMENTS LAST WEEK BY THE TWO PRINCIPAL REMOVEES, GENERALS VALENCIA AND PUYANA, MADE CLEAR THAT THEY INTENDED TO ACCEPT THE DECISION TO REMOVE THEM LIKE GOOD SOLDIERS, AND ADHERE TO THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL AUTHORITY WHICH GENERALLY HAS CHARACTERIZED THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY OVER THE YEARS. PUYANA HAS INDICATED HE MAY HAVE MORE TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT AT SOME FUTURE DATE. IT IS INCREASINGLY DOUBTFUL THAT THERE WAS AT ANY TIME DURING THE RECENT

TENSION ANY SERIOUS COUP PLOT, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS UNDOUBTEDLY SOME INTEMPERATE LOOSE TALK BY A SMALL NUMBER OF OFFICERS, PROBABLY INCLUDING PUYANA BUT NOT VALENCIA. THE COUP FEVER WAS LARGELY A PRODUCT OF THE MANNER AND TIMING OF THE FIRINGS, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO OFFER A TIMELY, PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THEM.

5. FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST THE MILITARY, INCLUDING THE RECENTLY SEPARATED MEMBERS, HAVE CLOSED RANKS, DENYING TO MOST OUTSIDERS THE EXISTENCE OF INTERNAL DISAGREEMENT AND DISSENSION, AND EMPHASIZING CIVIC VIRTUES. THE MILITARY WILL SEEK TO MAINTAIN THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE OF UNITY. HOWEVER, THERE IS AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE MUCH UNHAPPINESS IN THE MILITARY OVER THE SACKING OF THE POPULAR VALENCIA, ALONG WITH SOME REGRET AMONG CIVILIAN CIRCLES WHERE VALENCIA WAS PERCEIVED AS AN OFFICER WHO, FAR MORE THAN MOST, WAS AN INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS. THE FIRING OF VALENCIA MAY HAVE TENDED TO FURTHER FACTIONALIZE THE ARMY AROUND THE FIGURES OF VALENCIA AND DEFENSE MINISTER VARON AND RESENTMENTS WILL CONTINUE TO FESTER. THEREMAY BE SOME FURTHER DISMISSALS OF LOWER RANKING OFFICERS. MOST OBSERVERS PREDICT MINISTER VARON'S DEPARTURE IN THE NEXT CABINET RESHUFFLE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BOGOTA 5173

6. EMBASSY SOURCES REPORT THAT THE MILITARY ARE ONCE AGAIN PRESSING LOPEZ TO DECLARE A PARTIAL STATE OF SIEGE FOR BOGOTA TO BETTER COPE WITH EXPECTED STUDENT DISORDERS. LOPEZ REMAINS RELUCTANT TO DO SO, BUT HE MAY FEEL THAT HE SHOULD DO SOMETHING TO PLEASE THE AGGRIEVED ARMY.

7. MINISTER OF JUSTICE GUILTY OF TACTLESSNESS. ON JUNE 4, ATTORNEY GENERAL JAIME SERRANO COMPLETED THE OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION ORDERED BY PRES LOPEZ OF ALLEGED VERBAL ATTACKS AGAINST THE SUPREME COURT BY MIN OF JUSTICE ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO (BOGOTA 4948). IN A LETTER TO LOPEZ, SERRANO STATED THAT TAPE RECORDINGS MADE OF A RECENT SANTOFIMIO SPEECH IN IBAGUE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE MIN OF JUSTICE HAD COMMITTED A "TACTLESS OFFENSE" AGAINST THE COURT AND ITS MEMBERS BY CALLING THE COURT A ""CLUB OF FAVORITES" WHOSE NEW APPOINTEES OBTAIN THEIR POSITIONS THROUGH THEIR TIES WITH OTHER MEMBERS (THE COURT MEMBERS APPOINT NEW MEMBERS TO FILL VACANCIES) RATHER THAN ON THE BASIS OF MERIT. REPORTEDLY, PRES LOPEZ CONFRONTED SANTOFIMIO WITH THE FINDINGS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL JUNE 4, BUT THE RESULTS OF THE MEETING WERE NOT REVEALED. IT IS EXPECTED THAT SANTOFIMIO WILL BE SOMEWHAT SILENT IN PUBLIC DURING THE REMAINING MONTH IN WHICH HE IS EXPECTED TO REMAIN OFFICE.
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8. CEMENT STRIKE CONTINUES, EFFECTS CAUSING CONCERN. THE ONE-MONTH OLD NATIONWIDE CEMENT WORKER'S STRIKE HAS BEGUN TO CAUSE CONCERN AMONG COLOMBIAN OFFICIALS AND PUBLIC. REPORTEDLY CONSTRUCTION WAS PARALYZED IN MEDELLIN AND BUCARAMANGA, WHILE IN BOGOTA CEMENT WAS AVAILABLE ONLY FOR UP TO TRIPLE THE NORMAL PRICE. THE MIN OF LABOR ANNOUNCED JUNE 4 THAT IT WAS WITHDRAWING ITS MEDIATION EFFORTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY BUT WOULD OFFER ITS SERVICES TO THOSE UNIONS AND EMPLOYERS WHO INDICATE A REAL DESIRE TO REACH AN ACCORD. THE STUMBLING BLOCK APPEARED TO BE MANAGEMENT'S REFUSAL TO NEGOTIATE A "DE FACTO" NATIONAL AGREEMENT WITH A UNION NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE. THE CEMENT WORKERS UNION IS AN AFFILIATE OF COMMUNIST-LED TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (CSTC). INDUSTRY-WIDE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE LONG BEEN A GOAL OF THE COLOMBIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT BUT MOST COMPANIES PREFER TO NEGOTIATE ON A PLANT-BY-PLANT BASIS. BUSINESS REPS ANNOUNCED THAT THE STRIKE HAD COST WORKERS 100,000 JOBS AND MILLIONS OF PESOS IN LOSSES TO COMPANIES. THEY ALSO CLAIMED THAT THE STRIKERS WERE GETTING SUBSIDIES "PROBABLY FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES" OF 30 PESOS DAILY TO FINANCE THE STRIKE. THE CEMENT WORKERS, THE CSTC AND SYMPATHIZERS PREPARED A DEMONSTRATION SCHEDULED FOR LATE AFTERNOON JUNE 5 (ORIGINALLY PLANNED FOR JUNE 4) IN BOGOTA. BOTH SIDES MAY BE EXPECTED TO REMAIN IN AN

UNCOMPROMISING MOOD, AT LEAST FOR THE SHORT TERM. IF THE CSTC

IS SUCCESSFUL IN OBTAINING AN INDUSTRY-WIDE AGREEMENT, IT WILL MARK A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH IN PROMOTING INDUSTRIAL UNIONS IN COLOMBIA.

9. MAY COST-OF-LIVING FIGURES. THE COLOMBIAN COST OF LIVING INDEX INCREASED 1.75 PERCENT IN MAY, 75 VERSUS A 1.2 PC INCREASE IN THE SAME MONTH LAST YEAR. THE MAY DATA THUS INTERRUPTED THE STRING OF FOUR CONSECUTIVE MONTHS IN WHICH THE INDEX GROWTH HAD BEEN LESS THAN LAST YEAR. A MAJOR PORTION OF THE INCREASE WAS ATTRIBUTABLE TO SHORTAGES OF SEVERAL FOOD PRODUCTS IN BAR-RANQUILLA AS A RESULT OF DISTRIBUTION PROBLEMS. THE TOTAL INCREASE FOR THE YEAR NOW STANDS AT 11.8 PC VERSUS A 12.8 PC INCREASE IN 1974. THE MAY DATA REDUCES SLIGHTLY THE PROBABILITY THAT THE INCREASE FOR THE ENTIRE YEAR WILL BE BELOW THE ANNOUNCED GOAL OF 20 PERCENT, BUT AS INDICATED PREVIOUSLY THE SUMMER MONTHS USUALLY SHOW ONLY MODEST INCREASES AND THE EXTRAORDINARY OCT AND NOV
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INCREASES OF LAST YEAR WILL PROBABLY NOT BE REPEATED.

10. THE CUBAN TRADE MISSION WHICH WAS TO ARRIVE IN COLOMBIA MAY 15 (BOGOTA 4294) IS NOW DUE TO ARRIVE ON JUNE 9. THE MISSION WILL BE HEADED BY ARNOLDO RODRIGUES OF THE CUBAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN TRADE.
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